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ABSTRACT

This first-year report of the National Effective Transfer Consortium (NETC) summarizes the progress made by the member colleges in creating standardized measures of actual and expected transfer rates and of transfer effectiveness, and establishing a database that would enable valid comparisons among NETC colleges. Following background information on the NETC, the report proposes a new definition of transfer rate (i.e., the number of transfers divided by the number of non-reenrolling students), arguing that this definition more specifically identifies the number of students who could reasonably transfer rather than the number of students out of the entire student body who transferred. The second section explores various factors that help determine a range of expected transfer rates for an individual college, including the local business environment, federal policies, college mission, academic program, and student demographics, and student services. Drawing from the NETC database, this section suggests that colleges with a high percentage of full-time students tend to have higher transfer rates than colleges with a low percentage of full-time students. The third section proposes a method for measuring transfer effectiveness that does not penalize colleges with large vocational/technological programs and, frequently, a large pool of students who neither want to transfer nor do so. The proposed model defines transfer effectiveness as the number of students who transfer compared to the number of students that are expected to transfer. Arguing that transfer effectiveness depends on a college's organizational environment and its successful implementation of specific transfer-related strategies, the report concludes with a college self-assessment guide. (WJT)

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ENHANCING TRANSFER EFFECTIVENESS

A Model for the 1990's

NETC
NATIONAL EFFECTIVE TRANSFER CONSORTIUM

First Year Report to the
National Effective Transfer Consortium

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January, 1990

JC 900 218

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A Message from NETC...

Dear Colleague:

We are in an era of accelerating change. The transition from separate industrial nations to a world economy based on information has come more rapidly and more fully than anyone had predicted, and the pace of economic and technological change shows no sign of abating.

If we are to succeed in this competitive environment, more of our citizens must attain high levels of technological competence and continue to learn throughout their lives. This poses a great challenge for higher education: providing mass education at successively higher skill levels. Nowhere does this responsibility rest more strongly than with the community colleges; for millions of students we hold the key to productive lives in the twenty-first century. As that new century approaches, our campuses are serving more women, ethnic and language minorities, immigrants, the sons and daughters of the poor, and other "non-traditional" students. We will be called on to take the lead in providing increasing numbers of these students — and traditional students — with the higher levels of preparation needed in order to succeed at four-year colleges and universities.

The National Effective Transfer Consortium was formed in late 1987 in the belief that community colleges in the 1990's have an historic responsibility — and opportunity — to increase the number of students who transfer to four-year institutions. From the outset, we have felt that the best way to meet this responsibility was to sponsor a program of quality research that attacks the basic issues surrounding the transfer function. The Consortium engaged BW Associates to conduct this research at NETC colleges, and we are tremendously excited about the concrete results that have emerged from the first year of this work. Those results are summarized in this report.

The research reviewed in the following pages is already being utilized at Consortium colleges to review and improve transfer education. Our research program is continuing, and we look forward to sharing additional findings with you in the near future.

For the National Effective Transfer Consortium

Thomas W. Fryer, Jr.

Thomas W. Fryer, Jr., Chancellor
Foothill-De Anza Community College District

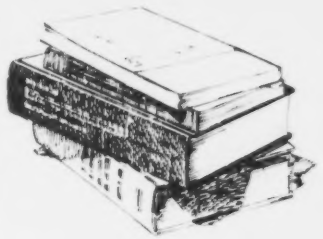
Preface

The National Effective Transfer Consortium (NETC) was founded so that community colleges could work together to enhance their capability to transfer students to four-year colleges and universities. Regarding research as a key to progress, NETC asked us to:

- bring clarity to the transfer issue;
- identify effective practices appropriate to the different circumstances faced by community colleges;
- establish a database that would enable valid comparisons to be made among NETC colleges.

This volume summarizes progress after the first year's efforts. During this initial phase, BW conducted fieldwork at all the NETC colleges and mailed a questionnaire to more than 30,000 students. With an average response rate of forty-four percent, a database containing survey responses from about 14,000 students has been created. Other student data — ethnicity, age, gender, enrollment status, etc. — has been added to the survey information on all credit enrollees from each college for Spring and Fall 1988. This massive database — amounting to information on almost 300,000 students in 13 states — is unique. A wide range of transfer issues can now be examined quantitatively and comparatively for the first time.

Every community college has a distinctive context, educational program, faculty and student body. The data for each NETC college have thus been



analyzed individually in a report presented only to that college. In addition to these individual college reports, a companion volume provides conceptual underpinnings for the analysis. It redefines the measurement of transfer rate, introduces the concept of transfer effectiveness, proposes a model of factors affecting transfer, and describes organizational practices that may be effective in assisting different types of students to transfer. This Executive Summary provides an overview of that report.

The founding members of the National Effective Transfer Consortium have made this research possible. We believe the results will have a profound effect on how the transfer function is perceived. Further, we hope that this work will enable community colleges to identify priority areas for developing a repertoire of effective transfer practices that match their needs.

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Defining a New Transfer Rate

"A GAP HAS THUS BEEN CREATED BETWEEN THE REALITY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER SUCCESS AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS."

Community colleges have often been accused of doing an inadequate job of transferring their students to four-year colleges and universities. But community colleges do in fact transfer many students from increasingly diverse populations, even though most come to them for reasons other than transfer. A gap has thus been created between the reality of community college transfer success and public perceptions.

A primary cause of this perception gap is the way in which transfer rate has been defined. Though approaches to the measurement of transfer activity vary from state to state, none of the common definitions accurately or fairly measure the relative success of community colleges in transferring students.

Perhaps the most common definition of transfer rate is:

$$\frac{\textbf{Number of Transfers}}{\textbf{Total Credit Enrollment}} \textbf{ X 100}$$

Using this definition (abbreviated as T over E), the average 1988 Spring to Fall transfer rate for NETC colleges was about five percent — a level that does not represent the true transfer accomplishments of NETC members.

T over E provides an accurate answer to the wrong question: "What percentage of the total student body enrolled for credit in a given semester transferred in that semester?" Yet most enrolled students in a given term simply are not able to transfer at the end of that term, particularly those who have only recently enrolled in the college or have accumulated few credits. This common definition therefore artificially lowers transfer rates by inappro-

priately counting all enrolled credit students in a given semester in the denominator of the formula, regardless of whether they are able to transfer in that semester.

There is a simple and powerful solution to the measurement issues inherent in this and other common definitions of transfer rate. The denominator for the transfer rate should be the "exiting cohort" of students in a term — that is, those students who were enrolled for credit in one term but did not re-enroll in the subsequent term. We call these students Leavers.

Instead of T over E, we propose *a new transfer rate:*

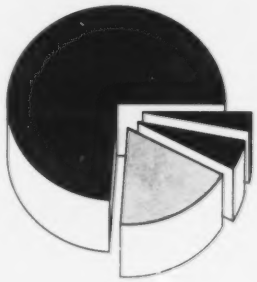
$$\frac{\textbf{Number of Transfers}}{\textbf{Number of Leavers}} \textbf{ X 100}$$

which is the number of Transfers divided by the number of Leavers (non-re-enrolling students) from one term to the next — or, in short, T over L.

This definition shifts the concept of transfer rate. It identifies transfer rate as the answer to a meaningful question: "What percentage of students leaving community college go on to four-year institutions?"

The new transfer rate is fair, elegant, easy for policymakers and the public to understand, and simple to calculate. A few refinements can further sharpen the concept. The definition logically ought to include in the denominator only students who could reasonably transfer. Therefore, it is sensible to exclude from the total of Leavers those credit enrollees who already have BA's or are concurrently enrolled in or on leave from a four-year college or university. In addition, many Leavers have earned fewer than

Leavers with 4-yr College Experience



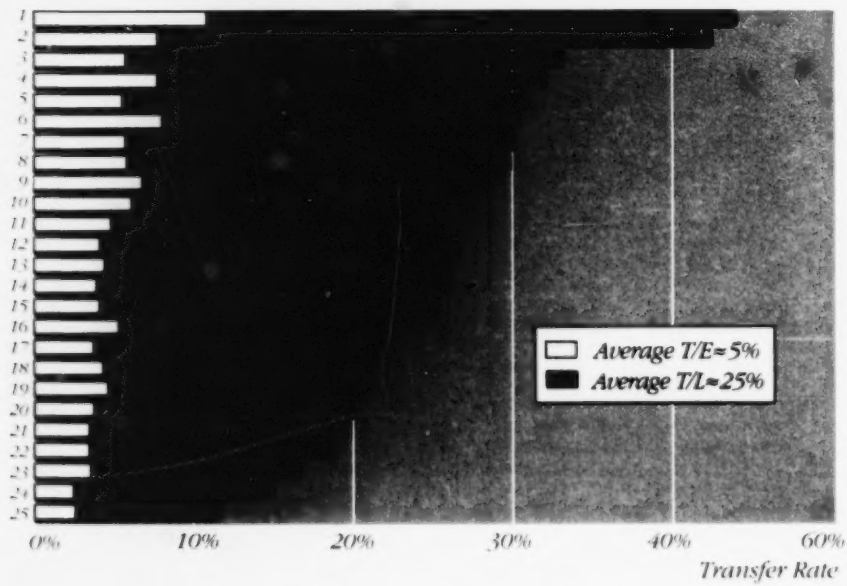
BA's 18%

Concurrent Enrollment 5%

On Leave 3%

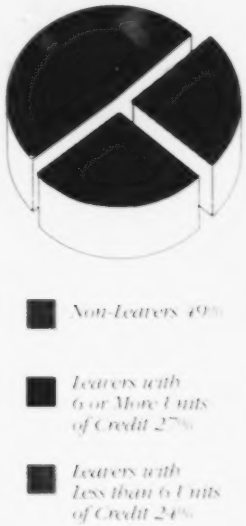
six credits. Since only a minute percentage of these Leavers could transfer without returning to community college, they also should be excluded from the denominator. These refinements are incorporated into the calculation of the new transfer rate used in this report.

The figure below illustrates the dramatically different picture of transfer that occurs by shifting to T over L: Instead of an average transfer rate of about 5 percent using T over E, NETC members have an average of about 25 percent using T over L.



T OVER E VS. T OVER L

Many Students Do Not Re-enroll the Next Term and About Half Have Less than Six Credits



This conceptualization yields another dividend. Outsiders too often see transfer as competitive with vocational activities when they are both vital missions of community colleges. Why not use the ideas developed for transfer rate to define a companion vocational rate? This new Vocational Completion Rate, V over L, would measure the proportion of vocational students in the existing cohort who have successfully completed their community college studies. Taken together, T over L plus V over L could provide a rich and balanced picture of community college accomplishments.

Expected Transfer Rates

Discussions about community college accountability often implicitly assume that the colleges *should* attain a certain transfer rate. But this assumption begs two critical questions: Is there a rate of transfer which might be expected of a community college? Should all colleges be expected to attain the same transfer rate? The answer to the former question is a qualified yes; to the latter, no. The following discussion summarizes the analyses leading to these conclusions.

Every community college operates within a broad setting of complex legal, fiscal, economic, demographic, regulatory and social factors that influence college policies and programs. These factors — the "external context" — fix the boundaries of what a college can achieve in its transfer education program. The figure on the facing page depicts this reality by presenting a model of factors that our research suggests affect transfer, with the outer ring representing external factors. After examining information from all NETC colleges, we have reached the following conclusion: External factors largely beyond a college's control determine a range within which a college's transfer rate can be expected to lie.

Consequently, not all community colleges should be expected to attain the same transfer rate. Each college can be thought of as having an Expected Transfer Rate Range determined by its external factors. Since colleges have very different settings, their transfer rates should be quite different from one another.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF FACTORS AFFECTING TRANSFER

"CONSEQUENTLY, NOT ALL COMMUNITY COLLEGES SHOULD BE EXPECTED TO ATTAIN THE SAME TRANSFER RATE."

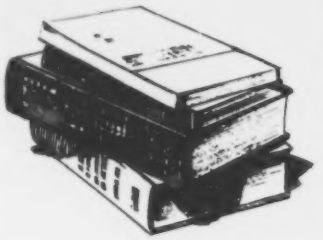
"SINCE COLLEGES HAVE VERY DIFFERENT SETTINGS, THEIR TRANSFER RATES SHOULD BE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER."

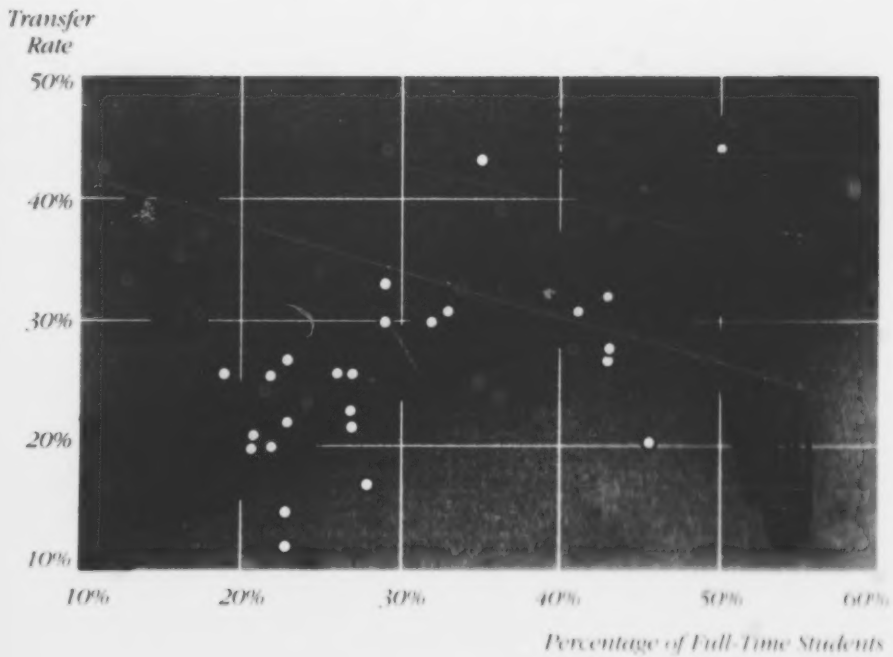
We have completed preliminary analyses aimed at calculating Expected Transfer Rate Ranges for NETC colleges. The data show that colleges with a high percentage of full-time students tend to have higher transfer rates than colleges with a low percentage of full-time students. This correlation is not accidental. Some of the same external factors that influence transfer rate also affect the percentage of full-time students at a college. The percentage of full-time students thus represents a proxy for the influence of those external factors, and, consequently, knowing a college's percentage of full-time students allows us to estimate its transfer rate.

The next figure illustrates this relationship. Each point symbolizes one college's percentage of full-time students and its transfer rate. The straight line represents Expected Transfer Rates — that is, the transfer rates we would predict based on the colleges' percentage of full-time students. The curved lines around the straight line signify the range within which transfer rates are expected to lie.

What if a college's actual transfer rate is above the curved line? One could then surmise that its transfer activities are quite effective. In contrast, if a college's actual transfer rate is below the curved line its transfer rate is less than what its setting suggests it could be, and its transfer activities probably need careful examination. Lastly, a college with a transfer rate within the curved lines might be pleased, though not content, with this accomplishment; its transfer activities probably are keeping pace with the difficult and challenging environment faced by today's community colleges.

In summary, whether the issue is accountability or self-improvement, the above calculations provide a tool to place a college's transfer rate into the perspective of what is possible in its own context.





EXPECTED TRANSFER RATES FOR NETC COLLEGES

Transfer Effectiveness

"TRANSFER RATE AND TRANSFER EFFECTIVENESS ARE THEREFORE DISTINCT CONCEPTS..."

The preceding analysis reached an important conclusion: A college's Expected Transfer Rate is largely determined by external factors, but its actual transfer rate falls above or below its expected range because of the *effectiveness*, or lack of effectiveness, of its transfer activities. Transfer rate and transfer effectiveness are therefore distinct concepts, with the former largely determined by external factors and the latter heavily dependent on the transfer strategies and organizational practices of the college.

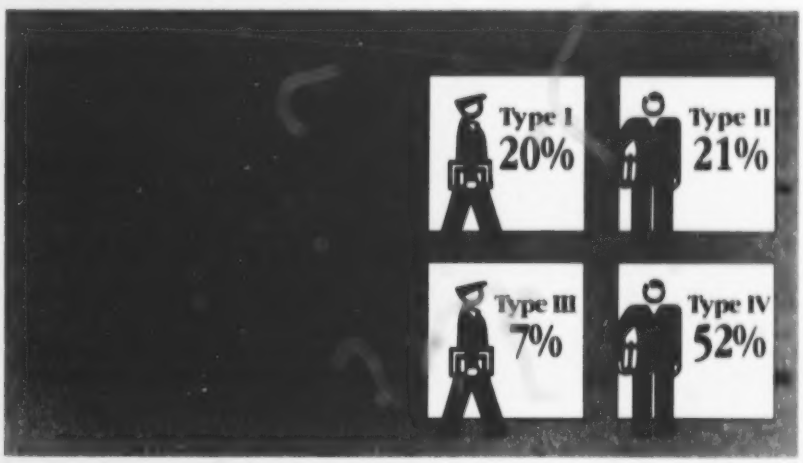
How should transfer effectiveness be measured?

The basic idea is simple enough: *Transfer Effectiveness is the number of students who transfer compared to the number of students that one expects to transfer.* Measuring the denominator — the number of students one expects to transfer — is operationally difficult, however.

In the student survey we conducted at all NETC colleges, an average of 42 percent of the Leavers said transferring had been an important reason for attending the community college. For the purposes of measuring Transfer Effectiveness, we consider these students as those who could have been expected to transfer.

Further analysis shows that some students who could have been expected to transfer in fact transferred — we call them Type I students. Others did not re-enroll and did not transfer, despite the expectation that they would (or eventually will) transfer — we call them Type II students.

However, the majority of Leavers (59 percent on the average across NETC colleges) said that transferring was not an important reason to attend their community college. Most of these students did not in fact transfer — we call them Type IV students. Finally, some students transferred even though they had not considered going on to a four-year college and probably could not have been expected to transfer. We call such "non-traditional" transfer students Type III students. The table below displays the average percentage of these types of students among NETC member colleges.



TRANSFER GOALS AND TRANSFERRING

"THESE MEASURES... HOLD THE PROMISE OF ENABLING COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO TARGET THEIR TRANSFER ACTIVITIES..."

To summarize:

The *Type I* student is expected to transfer and does so;

The *Type II* student is expected to transfer and does not do so;

The *Type III* student is not expected to transfer, but does so;

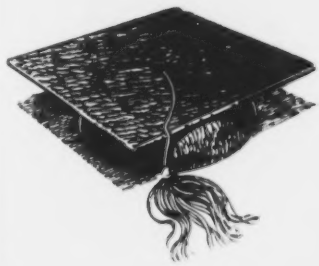
The *Type IV* student is not expected to transfer and does not do so.

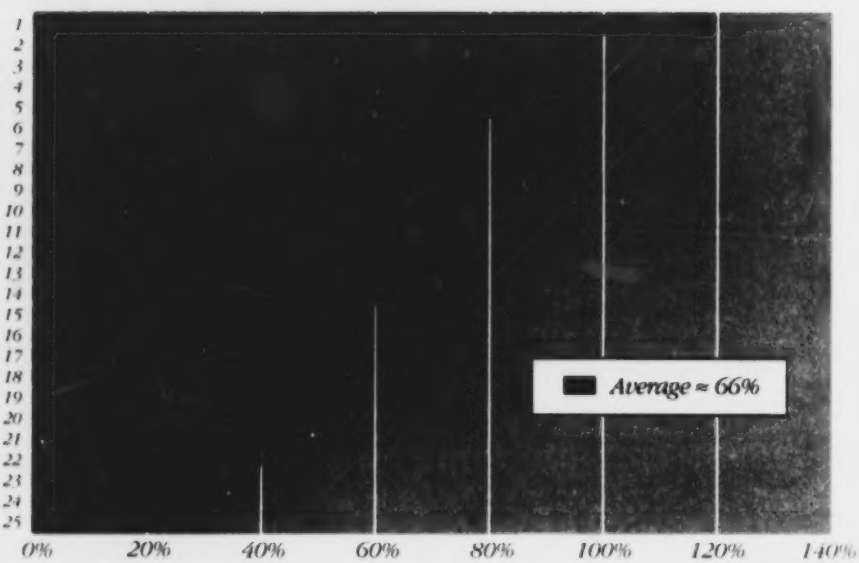
As these measures are developed further, they hold the promise of enabling community colleges to target their transfer activities more effectively.

Now we are conceptually armed with the elements needed for an operational definition of transfer effectiveness. Transfer Effectiveness is the number of students who transferred divided by the number who are expected to transfer, which is:

$$\frac{\textbf{\# Type I students + \# Type III students}}{\textbf{\# Type I students + \# Type II students}} \textbf{ X 100}$$

The figure on the facing page shows how NETC colleges varied in their Transfer Effectiveness. This calculation does not penalize colleges that have large vocational-technical programs and, consequently, have a large pool of students who neither want to transfer nor do so (Type IV students). It rather rewards colleges that enable *any* student to transfer whether or not he/she at first felt transferring was an important goal. Thus, effectiveness exceeds 100 per cent at some colleges because they transferred a relatively high proportion of Type III students.





TRANSFER EFFECTIVENESS OF NETC COLLEGES

Enhancing Transfer Effectiveness

"THERE IS NO SINGLE OR SIMPLE PRACTICE THAT WILL DRAMATICALLY INCREASE TRANSFER."

The measures discussed above enable us to address the central issue of this research project: How can colleges enhance their transfer effectiveness?

To answer this question, we identified NETC colleges with high transfer effectiveness and examined practices they used that might be adapted by other colleges. We found much variety and many effective practices, but one conclusion stands out: There is no single or simple practice that will dramatically increase transfer. At most NETC colleges, we saw transfer activities that are innovative and well implemented, but by themselves failed to have a significant and lasting impact on the college's overall transfer function.

What then distinguishes colleges with high transfer effectiveness?

In colleges with high transfer effectiveness, we discovered a multitude of activities — some loosely tied together, others centrally organized — that provided a foundation of support for specific transfer strategies which matched the needs and characteristics of the college.

In other words, the research showed that transfer effectiveness depends on two complex sets of factors — a college's organizational environment and how well it implements specific transfer-related strategies.

Sometimes colleges are unaware of the organizational and implementation issues they must simultaneously attend to in order to achieve and maintain high transfer effectiveness. We are now experimenting with the following guide that colleges can use to check on how well they manage major factors influencing transfer effectiveness.

Enhancing Transfer Effectiveness
A Self-Assessment Guide

Maintaining high transfer effectiveness is a complex process that requires multiple strategies, constant adjustment as conditions change, and much coordination. The following ten questions may help you assess how your college is currently handling this complex challenge and which areas may need strengthening.

1. Has transfer been established as a high priority for administrators, faculty, and staff throughout your college?
2. Are all services affecting transfer closely coordinated?
3. Do administrators and faculty work together to resolve problems related to transfer?
4. Does the college's long-run planning take into account the changing nature of transfer students?
5. Do you have complete, regularly updated articulation agreements and cooperative working relationships with four-year institutions to which your students generally transfer?
6. Does your campus have a well functioning transfer center i.e., a centrally-located administrative unit with responsibility for coordinating transfer-related activities?
7. Do you have the technological capacity to collect, process and display student data needed for transfer advising, display and update articulation databases, and identify and conduct research on different types of potential transfer students?
8. Have you developed cooperative relations with feeder high-schools, including outreach activities designed to increase recruitment and academic coordination of curricula and programs?
9. Have you developed special outreach activities to identify, contact, motivate, and assist non-traditional (Type III) students?
10. When reaching out to non-traditional students, do you emphasize personal contact between students and faculty, counselors, advisors, peers, mentors, and other sources of support?

The last two questions on the guide deserve special attention. The analysis identified Type III (or non-traditional) transfer students who transferred even though they had not enrolled at a community college with the goal of going on to a four-year campus. Type III students include some ethnic minorities, older re-entry students, low-income students, and students who are the first in their families to attend college.

The research indicates that:

- Transfer practices effective for traditional (Type I) students may not adequately reach or affect students with a low propensity to transfer;
- Most NETC colleges succeed in transferring only a relatively low percentage of potential Type III students.

Thus, there exists a large pool of students who do not now transfer but could do so with the right help and encouragement. This pool of students, if tapped, could significantly increase a college's overall transfer rate.

This suggests that colleges can increase their transfer effectiveness by identifying potential Type III students and designing transfer activities tailored to their needs.

The challenge for the 1990's may well be one of developing organizational environments and specific transfer strategies that can strike a balance between meeting the transfer needs of traditional (Type I) and non-traditional (Type III) transfer students.

If You Want To Know More...

This *Executive Summary* provides the highlights of the full NETC Report on **Enhancing Transfer Effectiveness.**

The full report discusses in much more detail:

- ***the new transfer rate measure***
- ***expected transfer rates***
- ***transfer effectiveness***
- ***effective transfer strategies and practices for traditional and non-traditional students***

It also reveals surprising patterns of enrollment and retention as well as graphically illustrating where students go when they leave community college.

Phase 2 will provide member colleges with diagnostic tools for assessing and improving their transfer practices.

Membership in the National Effective Transfer Consortium is open to all U.S. and Canadian public community colleges

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To order the full report on Enhancing Transfer Effectiveness ***or***

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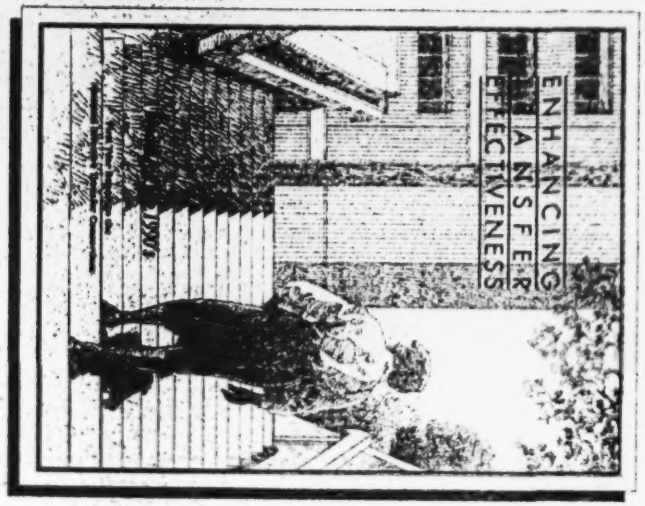

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